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Miller accuses Fantroy of ethics lapse on zone issue

He defends asking colleague to carry item after he cited conflict

09:39 PM CDT on Thursday,
September 23, 2004

By EMILY RAMSHAW /
The Dallas Morning News

Dallas Mayor Laura Miller accused City Council member James Fantroy on Thursday of violating the city's ethics policy at Wednesday's council meeting.

She said Mr. Fantroy, who excused himself from a vote on a zoning change in southern Dallas because of a conflict of interest, violated the city code by asking council member Maxine Thornton-Reese to carry the item through for him.

"Yesterday, it was very clear that he was calling the shots in a deal he has a financial interest in," Ms. Miller said. "It's unethical, if not illegal."

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Mr. Fantroy said he asked Dr. Thornton-Reese to make a motion for him because his constituents supported it. And he said if that's a violation of code, his colleagues should be in the same boat.

"I don't think there's anything wrong with me telling her I have a conflict," he said. "If I'm not allowed to do that, everyone here is making the same mistake."

Under city code, council members may not take action on items in which they have a conflict of interest, nor may they discuss them with their voting colleagues.

On Wednesday, Mr. Fantroy left the council chambers when his colleagues took up the zoning change in his district, citing a contract between his security business and the developer of the proposed multifamily housing complex.

During discussion of the item, Dr. Thornton-Reese announced that since Mr. Fantroy had a conflict and couldn't vote, she would be making the motion for him.

"He said he wanted to pass it," Dr. Thornton-Reese said at the meeting. "And he asked me to carry it, and I'm doing as he asked."

After Dr. Thornton-Reese spoke, council members approved the change by an 11-3 vote.

Ms. Miller said the council went through a similar situation with Mr. Fantroy less than a year ago, when members first learned his business had a contract with

James Fisher, a local developer.

After calling an executive session to deal with the conflict in the middle of a council meeting last year, she said, several council members asked the city attorney to talk to Mr. Fantroy about dropping his contract.

Mr. Fantroy declined. And the city attorney told the mayor that as long as he excuses himself from council action, his business contract is not inappropriate.

Mr. Fantroy said his decision last year not to break the contract still stands. While he owns JL Security, Mr. Fantroy said his son has operated it since 2000.

This week's case also dealt with Mr. Fisher, vice president of Provident Odyssey Partners. And the mayor said Mr. Fantroy's support for the zoning change— which would allow for multifamily housing units — looks strange because he has been so adamant about bringing single-family homes to southern Dallas.

"I know Mr. Fantroy sincerely wants single-family homes — he wants big lots and big houses," Ms. Miller said. "It's totally goes against everything he's said."

Mr. Fantroy agreed he is a strong proponent of bringing single-family homes to his district. And while he didn't go to any of the community meetings on the zoning change— a result, he said, of his conflict of interest — his

planning commissioner told him there was widespread support for the project on Simpson Stuart Road.

"The community wants this project because it's going to be built with condos, town home-style," he said. "I don't cut deals. I came down here to serve my community."

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